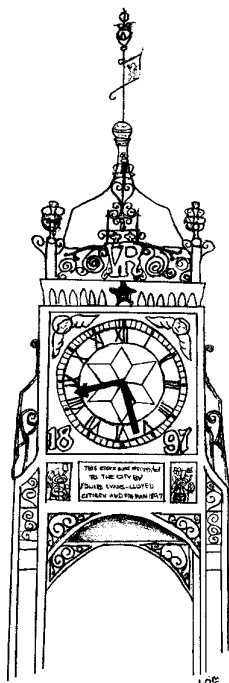


## CHESTER CHRONICLES.....

### The cave



EASTGATE CLOCK, CHESTER

It's with great trepidation that I launch into this. I dithered, ducked, dived, and dodged, but it has to be done. Men need a cave. There, I've said it! In one fell swoop I've alienated half of the readers.

I don't know why men need a cave—they just do. Now, we can all rail against the concept or accept and understand it. Just let us get on with our caving. For some reason, men seem able to completely differentiate home and work. When they're at home, they're at home, and when they're at work, they're at work (could it be because they manage to slither out of most of the home duties by simply forgetting about them?).

Anyway, often when men come home from work they are incapable of immediate engagement in family life. Now don't get me wrong, they are looking forward to coming home, but once in the door, it then takes them time to adjust to the new alien environment. They just can't do the instant switch that seems effortless for most women. The time required varies, but generally it's about 5–10 minutes of cave time.

The cave can be a browse through an ancient copy of *STI*, a few minutes of mindless telly, a poke around the garden, a fiddle at some engine, a scrape at some rust—you know, any mindless, irrelevant distraction.

Now, unless the partner understands what's happening, this shirking of immediate home responsibilities can be construed as deliberate avoidance.

I'd better give an example before this page gets torn out. When I worked as a specialist registrar in the famous Q clinic at the Royal Liverpool Hospital, it wasn't unusual to do 11 or 12 outpatient clinics per week (I've still got the rotas). Most days, by the time I'd get home, I'd be fit for a home for the bewildered. At home, there were four kids under 5 at one stage—not all my fault, two of them were twins. The twins would come hurtling down the hall to assault me—identical twin candlesticks tripping them up (they did get grommets put in eventually). There I'd be in my suit, holding them off desperately, pleading with Eileen to take them away or else I'd be chiselling this stuff off my trousers for days. She'd say, "well, OK, but just for a few minutes, I've had it up to here with the pair of them." I'd go up and have a shower—quietly mulling over the chaotic, frustrating day I'd had. I'd put on my shell suit—it was Liverpool (shell suit city) after all! I'd then come down and be up for a load of rough and tumble with the similarly shell suited twins. The static would be electric as we ionised on and around the furniture. I'd be in fine fettle and well able to be the enthusiastic, irresponsible, and dangerous Dad!

I now realise that it was the few minutes alone in the shower that was my cave time.

As roles become more and more blurred, many women are now also finding a need for cave time. If you don't understand what's happening it can be bewildering—that is, wanting desperately to get home and then once in the door, wanting desperately to avoid involvement.

Believe me, the cave is not an excuse, it's an explanation.

**Colm O'Mahony,**

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